

Sūrah 72

Al-Jinn

(The Jinn)

(Makkan Period)

Title

Al-Jinn is both the title and subject matter of this *Sūrah*, for it relates at length the episode of the *jinn* listening to the Qur'ān and preaching Islam among the members of their species on their return.

Period of Revelation

Both Bukhārī (K. *al-Tafsīr*, *Sūrah al-Jinn*) and Muslim (K. *al-Ṣalāt*, *Bāb al-Jahr bi al-Qirā'ah*) have cited this report on the authority of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās that once, while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was on his way to the 'Ukāz market along with some of his Companions, he led *Fajr* Prayer at Nakhlah. At that time, a group of *jinn* were passing by. They stopped on hearing the Qur'ān and listened to its recitation attentively. This incident is recounted within this *Sūrah*.

In light of the above report, most of the Qur'ān commentators take it as an event related to the Prophet's journey to Ṭā'if, which

took place in the tenth year of his mission, three years before his migration to Madīnah. However, this assumption is not sound on several grounds. As to the incident involving the *jinn* listening to the Qur'ān during the Prophet's journey to Ṭā'if, it is recorded in verses 29–32 of *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*. On studying those verses, it readily emerges that the *jinn* who had embraced the message of Islam then were already believers in the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) and earlier Scriptures. On the contrary, verses 2–7 of this *Sūrah* indicate that these *jinn* were polytheists, who did not believe in the Resurrection and the institution of the Prophethood. Furthermore, it is on record that only Zayd ibn Hārithah had accompanied the Prophet (peace be upon him) during his journey to Ṭā'if. On this occasion, however, as informed by Ibn 'Abbās, he was accompanied by some of his Companions. Moreover, all the reports state that those *jinn* had listened to the Qur'ān when the Prophet (peace be upon him) had stayed at Nakhlah, on returning from Ṭā'if to Makkah. During this journey, the incident occurred when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was on his way from Makkah to 'Ukāz. On the basis of the above, it is safer to assume that *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf* and *Sūrah al-Jinn* describe two separate events which took place during the Prophet's two separate journeys and that these do not relate to the same incident.

As to the episode featuring in *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, the reports unanimously state that it happened in the tenth year of the Prophet's mission during his return journey from Ṭā'if. However, as to the date of the second episode, Ibn 'Abbās's report is silent over it. No other report provides any clue about the date when the Prophet (peace be upon him) visited 'Ukāz along with some of his Companions. On studying verses 8–10 of this *Sūrah* closely, however, it appears that this incident may have taken place in the early years of the Prophet's career, as these verses state that before the Prophet's advent, the *jinn* somehow got an opportunity to gather news from the heavens. However, all of a sudden they noted the entire heavenly space had been cordoned off by the angels and there was a downpour of meteorites from every side. This prevented them from finding any space to sneak or eavesdrop. As a result, they became curious to find out about the special event on earth which had occasioned such strict security.

Most probably several groups of *jinn* set out to ascertain the matter. One of these groups, on hearing the Prophet's recitation of the Qur'ān, assumed that the revelation of this new divine message had placed stringent restrictions and the gates of the heavens had been shut on them.

Nature of the Jinn

Before embarking upon the study of this *Sūrah*, it will be in order to discuss the nature of the *jinn* to avoid any misconceptions. In our times, many people suffer from the delusion that the *jinn* do not exist and that it is an outdated notion. This assumption of theirs does not rest on sound knowledge. Since they do not have any clinching argument for the non-existence of the *jinn* they cannot lay any such claim. Yet they insist, without any evidence, that nothing exists in the universe except that which is within the reach of their sense of perception. Let us not forget that man's sense of perception apprehends only an infinitesimal part of the universe like a drop in the ocean. If one insists that anything beyond the realm of the unseen is non-existent and what is existent must necessarily be perceivable betrays his own narrow outlook. Going by this flawed logic, man will have to deny not only the *jinn*, but also numerous other truths. Such a person will not believe even in the existence of God, what to say of other intangible things.

As to those Muslims who are under the influence of the above mindset, they cannot dare deny the Qur'ān, they seek to offer garbled versions of the plain, categorical Qur'ānic descriptions of the *jinn*, Iblīs, and Satan. For them, *jinn* are not some invisible creatures who enjoy their independent existence. At times, they equate them with man's animal instincts called Satan. Some others define them as uncivilised communities inhabiting forests and mountains. Some explain the above incident as the reference to some human beings who used to listen to the recitation of the Qur'ān secretly. However, the categorical and explicit Qur'ānic statements about the *jinn* do not admit any of the above flawed interpretations.

The Qur'ān repeatedly speaks of men and *jinn* as two separate creatures. The following Qur'ānic passages are instances in point:

Verses 38 of *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 119 of *Sūrah Hūd*, 25 and 29 of *Sūrah Hā Mīm al-Sajdah*, 18 of *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf*, 56 of *Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt*, 6 of *Sūrah al-Nās* and the entire *Sūrah al-Raḥmān*, which leaves no room whatsoever for mistaking the *jinn* as members of the human species.

Verses 12 of *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 26–27 of *Sūrah al-Ḥijr* and 14–15 of *Sūrah al-Raḥmān* proclaim expressly that man is created of clay whereas the *jinn* is created of fire.

Verse 27 of *Sūrah al-Ḥijr* clarifies that the *jinn* were created prior to man. This truth is reinforced by the account of the Prophet Ādam (peace be upon him) and Iblīs, which is related at seven places in the Qur'ān. It is consistently said in all the above Qur'ānic passages that Iblīs was already there when man was created. Verse 50 of *Sūrah al-Kahf* conclusively states that Iblīs was a *jinn*.

Verse 27 of *Sūrah al-A'rāf* declares that whereas the *jinn* are able to see human beings, the latter cannot see them.

Verses 16–18 of *Sūrah al-Ḥijr*, 6–10 of *Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt* and 5 of *Sūrah al-Mulk* inform that although the *jinn* may ascend to the heavens, they cannot go beyond a certain limit. If they try to ascend further or spy on what is going on in the heavens, they are stopped from proceeding any further. If they eavesdrop, meteorites pursue them. This refutes the misperception of the Arab polytheists about the *jinn*s' access to the Unseen or divine dispensation. The same fallacious notion is demolished in verse 14 of *Sūrah Saba'*.

It is evident from verses 30–34 of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* and 50 of *Sūrah al-Kahf* that God has bestowed His vicegerency on man and that as a creature, man is superior to the *jinn*. It is an altogether different point that the *jinn* have been endowed with some extraordinary abilities, as one learns from verse 7 of *Sūrah al-Naml*. However, even some animals excel man in certain special abilities; this does not establish their superiority over man.

The Qur'ān informs that like man, the *jinn* have been granted free will to choose between obedience and rebellion to God and between faith and disbelief. The above is substantiated by the Qur'ānic account of Iblīs and of his description of some *jinn* embracing faith, as detailed in *Sūrah al-Aḥqāf* and *Sūrah al-Jinn*.

It is recurrently clarified in the Qur'ān that from the time of man's creation Satan had resolved to mislead man. Since then

satans among the men and the *jinn* have been engaged in misdirecting humanity. They cannot compel man into sinning. However, they are quite capable of putting false notions into man's mind, of misleading him, and of presenting evil before him as something alluring and pleasant. This point is made clear from the following Qur'ānic passages: verses 117–120 of *Sūrah al-Nisā'*, 11–17 of *Sūrah al-A'rāf*, 22 of *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*, 30–42 of *Sūrah al-Hijr*, 98–100 of *Sūrah al-Nahl* and 61–65 of *Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl*.

The Qur'ān states that in the age of *Jāhiliyyah*, the Arab polytheists regarded the *jinn* as God's partners, worshipped them, and ascribed divinity to them. Their beliefs feature in verses 100 of *Sūrah al-An'ām*, 40–41 of *Sūrah Saba'* and 158 of *Sūrah al-Ṣaffāt*.

The above account makes it abundantly clear that the *jinn* have their independent existence and that they are a distinct species, independent of human beings. The ignorant people entertain highly exaggerated and baseless notions about the *jinn* in view of the mystery surrounding them. Some went to the extent of even worshipping them. The Qur'ān, however, defines them fully in terms of what they are and what they are not.

Subject Matter and Themes

Verses 1–15 of this *Sūrah* relate the impact of the Qur'ān recitation upon a group of the *jinn*. On their return to their community, how did they convey to them the message of the Qur'ān? The Qur'ān has not reproduced in full their conversation with their community members. Rather, it has focused on only the salient points of this exchange. For this purpose, the style is not of a continuous conversation but a selected portion of the narrative. On studying these sentences carefully, one may easily grasp the rationale behind their inclusion in the Qur'ān, for the Qur'ān quotes only those statements of theirs which concern their acceptance of faith. Our explanatory notes will facilitate further the appreciation of this episode.

Verses 16–18 admonish mankind, asking them to give up polytheism and to follow the straight way consistently. It will bring to them numerous divine blessings. Otherwise, their rejection of the divine message will bring upon them God's severe

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punishment. Verses 19–22 reproach the Makkan disbelievers for their hostility towards the Prophet (peace be upon him) when he invites them to God's way. The job of the Messenger is to convey the divine message. He does not claim to have the power to benefit or harm anyone. Verses 24–25 further warn the disbelievers that notwithstanding their efforts to stifle the Prophet's voice, they will soon realise who enjoys power and success – they or the Prophet (peace be upon him). Whether that Day is far or near even the Prophet (peace be upon him) does not know when it will happen. However, the occurrence of that Day is inevitable. Finally, people are told that God alone knows all that is beyond the ken of man's perception. A Messenger possesses only such knowledge which God grants him, that which is essential for discharging his duty as the Messenger. Such knowledge is transmitted to him safely, protected against any external interference whatsoever.